

No Rest for the Willing

Extracts

In younger years I found it difficult to talk about the war, and easier to stay away from former comrades, other than on Anzac Day, as a way of trying to blot out the horrors of the past from my day-to-day consciousness. Retirement brought the strangest sort of release. Not only was I sleeping more peacefully, but I now wanted to seek out those who'd shared that part of my life with me. I joined the Gold Coast branch of the Rats of Tobruk Association and found a world of comfort and fulfillment ...



Joe Pamensky and his wife Pam were also very kind to us. We were always seated in the executive box at each cricket match. At the Wanderers' game Joe sat us next to the internationally renowned South African anti-apartheid politician, Helen Suzman, who was chatty and interesting. Joe organised our hotels and whenever Bruce was absent on official business, he arranged friends to look after us.

We also met Dr Danie (Doc) Craven, a man of many talents: for starters, he had three earned PhDs, which explains the nickname. He was President of the South African Rugby Board, and arguably the equivalent of Don Bradman in international rugby terms. Bruce and he worked on many projects together over the years and we were thrilled when he invited us ...



Jarlath and Margie became close friends with Sir Zelman and his wife Lady Anna Cowen, and Audette and I were privileged to spend a day with them at their Caloundra holiday home one Christmas. Sir Zelman sent me a copy of his book, *Isaac Isaacs*, which I devoured within days of receiving it. I enjoyed the book immensely and when Audette vetted my thank you letter, her only comment was that she didn't know I had broken my foot, which I clearly used to write the letter. I had suffered a mild stroke and written little other than birthday and Christmas cards since retirement, so I recognised that she had a point. I practised my handwriting for a couple of hours a day for a month before Audette cleared my note for sending. To avoid any repetition I kept up the writing schedule every day, for several years ...



I spent eight weeks in various hospital wards and another four in the hospital's rehabilitation unit. I must have had 20 different nurses over the three months and they were all wonderful, although I did have a misunderstanding with one of them early on. I wanted to go to the toilet urgently and rang my bell. The nurse came and said she would be with me in a few minutes. I told her that I needed her now. She told me there were a lot of other patients in the hospital who were much sicker than I was and that I would have to wait. I told her not to worry about them,

'If they are sicker than I am, they must be dead' ...



As on that wonderful day in the Channel Nine box at the Gabba everyone was so kind and attentive. We were escorted to our seats, with our guides, including Kyle Patterson, the General Manager of Communications and Media, ANZ Stadium, and former SBS sports commentator, ever-patient. My walking-frame and Audette's walking stick necessitated the slowest of paces, but they stayed steadfastly beside us, talking with us, showing interest, when they must have been feeling the time-pressure of their own full schedules for the evening.

We came into the stadium through the inner sanctum of the main grandstand and around the right-hand side of the stage, with the distant murmur of the crowd suddenly becoming the roar of the chatter of 40,000 people. The sight as we came around the corner was magnificent. Across the full extent of the ground were row upon row of seats, and beyond them to the side and rear, the tiers of grandstand seating, filling with colour as people found their places. We were in the second row, just to the left of the centre stage. The stage setting was a magnificent castle, including a ballroom and two skating rinks, and two huge screens at either side of the stage, so that no one could miss the tiniest detail of the show – it was spectacular. And the rain had stopped, probably in awe of what was to come.

The glamorous gowns, the music, the laughter, the audience dancing – not me, but I was dancing on the inside, and joined in the singing – were magical. Briefly Audette and I got to our feet, nodding our heads to the music as Bruce's arm stopped me from falling back into my chair. Margie jigged about on the spot, head, arms and feet all moving to the rhythm, and all about us, including Alan, having the time of their lives. André Rieu is a master musician and entertainer, and a master human being. His troupe is his family, and the warmth is contagious. I had watched him on television bringing out the most extraordinary emotions in people, even reserved men, through the special magic that is André Rieu, and here I was seeing him in full flight, in person. The atmosphere was electric, the mass joy palpable ...